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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002012

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE AND SCA/INS

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PM ERDOGAN'S PASSAGE TO INDIA

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Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Eight years after the last visit to New Delhi by a Turkish Government leader, Prime Minister Erdogan departs November 20 for a four-day trip to India. Both the MFA and Indian Embassy in Ankara describe the visit as "overdue," but emphasize that it reflects a healthy bilateral rapport far removed from the Cold War era. Erdogan's trip will focus on commercial-trade issues, and his delegation includes more than 80 businessmen. Trade levels already exceed \$3 billion annually, a five-fold increase from 2002, but are imbalanced in India's favor. The MFA told us that Pakistan will lead the list of regional topics during the official meetings. This trip is likely to play well in the Turkish media, reinforcing ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) themes that Turkey now performs on a global stage. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Prime Minister Erdogan's delegation will include some 80 business representatives, as well as a dozen journalists and an equal number of MFA and Prime Ministry officials, according to the MFA's Babur Hizlan, deputy director general for South Asia. The emphasis during the visit will be weighted toward trade and commerce, and Erdogan will spend a full day in Bangalore, where he will meet the governor and the provincial prime minister, and also visit Cyber City, reportedly considered the ultra high technology area of the province, as well as the Space Exploration Center. The last visit to India by a Turkish Prime Minister (Ecevit) occurred in 2000, and both the MFA and the Indian Embassy in Ankara describe Erdogan's trip as "overdue."

¶3. (C) Erdogan will spend four days in India, arriving late on November 20 and departing in the evening on November 24. The schedule includes separate meetings with the India president, prime minister, foreign minister and the head of the main opposition party. On November 23, Erdogan will travel to Agra.

¶4. (C) The MFA told us that they had hoped to sign an extended protocol on counterterrorism that would bolster cooperation between the two Interior Ministries. However, all such agreements must be approved by the Indian cabinet, which requires nine working days -- a deadline that could not be met, according to the MFA. A proposal to initial this agreement had been rejected as inappropriate for the prime ministers' level. Similarly a three-year Cultural Agreement, based on the 1951 umbrella pact, did not win cabinet approval

in time so must be signed later.

¶5. (C) Hizlan told us that this visit builds on FM Babacan's trip to India in February, and Trade Minister Tuzmen's visit to India in March. The MFA hopes that President Gul will travel to India early next year. The Indian Embassy's charge, Sanjay Verma, was resoundingly upbeat, noting that Turkey and India have "hardly any political differences," and that they enjoy full relations on numerous fronts, from commercial to cultural. Erdogan's visit, he said, "reinforces that we need to be together."

¶6. (C) Both Verma and Hizlan underscored that trade relations have blossomed over the last five years: from \$600 million annually in 2003 to \$2.7 billion in 2007, and expected to reach \$3.2 billion this year. The trade balance is heavily in India's favor, Hizlan said, so the Turkish delegation members hope to press their hosts for new business contracts to restore some equilibrium. Verma said the main trade sectors are in cotton, natural stone, gems, organic chemicals, and textile machinery.

¶7. (C) Hizlan said the issue of Pakistan will head the list of regional topics discussed during the official meetings. He noted that Turkey's strong relationship with Pakistan "is a given," but that this will not hinder Turkey from establishing strong ties to India. Both Turkey and India are worried about increasing instability in Pakistan, he said. Verma echoed these sentiments, but underscored that Pakistan and India have established their own productive dialogue and do not see the need for Turkey to play middleman. Hizlan said Erdogan will also probe his Indian hosts on how they evaluate Afghanistan, and whether joint construction projects could be developed.

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¶8. (C) COMMENT: These upbeat assessments are an intriguing contrast to the Cold War era, when India was perceived by Turkey as firmly in the Soviet Union's inner circle of Non-Aligned Movement allies and Ankara and New Delhi kept their distance. News coverage of Erdogan's India travels is likely to play well in Turkey, reinforcing the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) themes that portray Turkey as a global player with substantial influence abroad.

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